

Battling SUPERSTORM

Story by MSG Bob Haskell

PH1 Michael Pentagrass, USN



SFC Alberto Betancourt



MORE than 2,500 Army and Air National Guard troops in five states and the District of Columbia turned out in September with chainsaws, trucks and water trailers to help people along the East Coast deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Isabel.

The Guard members evacuated people from flooded island homes to shelters on higher ground; helped local police departments prevent looting; provided clean water and ice to communities with contaminated water systems; and helped state transportation workers clean up debris.

"I'm always impressed by their dedication, commitment and willingness to respond at a moment's notice — at times, putting their own wellbeing at risk," said COL Peter Aylward, who directed the National Guard Bureau's Crisis Action Team in Arlington, Va. "We will do whatever it takes to help save lives, prevent suffering and minimize property damage."

Guard Soldiers drove Humvees into 30-inch deep floodwaters to rescue people stranded on islands along Maryland's Eastern Shore. Nine Guard members spent the weekend in Rock Hall, providing local police with enough of a presence to prevent looting, said MAJ Todd Stewart, who commanded a 200-Soldier task force that was responsible for a 250-mile area along that shore.

Most of the Guard's weekend efforts were focused ➤

MSG Bob Haskell works for the National Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office.



MAJ Cotton Puryear



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Battered by high winds, heavy surf and torrential rain, communities along the nation's East Coast called on the National Guard for assistance.



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in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, where hundreds of thousands of people were coping without electricity or drinking water. The storm was blamed for about 30 deaths, including 17 in Virginia.

More than 1,300 Guard members were on duty in North Carolina, and over 600 were serving in Virginia. Nearly 700 were on duty in Maryland during the weekend's peak of activity, and 170 were serving in the nation's capital.

Using five-ton trucks and Humvees, Guard members evacuated more than 1,000 people from Maryland coastal communities and provided security for several islands, said MAJ Charles Kohler, a Maryland Guard spokesman.

North Carolina Guard members airlifted food, water and ice to the Outer Banks, transported 2,500 gallons of fuel to the area by ferry boat, deployed 40 generator teams to provide auxiliary power to people without electricity, and dispatched security teams to North Hampton and Hyde counties, Guard officials reported.

In Virginia about 120 members of

▲ The flooding caused by Hurricane Isabel led to extensive damage to marinas and the boats they sheltered. These vessels were damaged at Fort Belvoir, Va.

► Among the National Guard soldiers called up in the wake of the hurricane were these members of the Virginia Army Guard's Co. C, 276th Engr. Bn., seen here clearing debris in Surry County.



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the 276th Engineer Battalion helped Department of Transportation crews clear some 400 miles of primary and secondary roads in Surry and Isle of Wight counties, between Virginia Beach and Richmond.

Other Virginia Guard Soldiers, from the 2nd Bn., 111th Field Artillery, were ordered to state active duty to help provide traffic control in Hampton, and to distribute water there and in Virginia Beach.

About 300 Guard Soldiers began operating eight regional water- and ice-distribution sites on Sept. 21, said LTC Chester Carter III, a Virginia Guard spokesman.

More than 1,400 National Guard troops in seven states were waiting when the Category 2 storm hit the North Carolina coast with 100 mph winds and torrential rains at midday on Sept. 18 and then cut a swath toward the north as it diminished to a tropical storm.

The combination of high winds and floodwaters from the storm, which was initially said to cover an area the

size of Montana, led to federal disaster declarations for North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia and Delaware. West Virginia, New Jersey and Pennsylvania government leaders declared state emergencies.

Guard members were ready to help state officials assess the damage and help citizens in those states as well. Fifteen two-man crews in West Virginia, for example, were prepared to rescue and evacuate citizens from areas of that waterlogged mountainous state, where flooding from Isabel's heavy rains was a major concern.

Air National Guard commanders ordered 59 planes — including jet fighters and transports — flown from their home bases in six states along the storm's projected path, between Virginia and New York, to safer locations in other parts of the country.

The Virginia Army Guard also sent six helicopters to Frankfort, Ky.

This war against the weather is an old National Guard mission under

▲ Traveling for the moment through deceptively calm seas, a cargo ship heads into Hurricane Isabel's outer band of clouds and rain. The storm ultimately disrupted shipping along the entire eastern seaboard.

new management.

It marked the first time that the Guard Bureau — which this year has been reorganized into a provisional joint command — oversaw the states' efforts to deal with the threat to people and property in America.

"We're here to provide the policies, the coordination and the money for the people who are doing the work," Christopher Gardner, the Guard Bureau's acting vice chief, told the members of the newly formed Crisis Action Team at the National Guard's headquarters.

Guard officials were quick to point out that plenty of Soldiers were available for state active duty, even though tens of thousands of Army and Air National Guard members have been deployed because of the global war against terrorism. 🇺🇸

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